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'Radio as usual'? Digital technologies and radio in conflict-Affected Burkina Faso

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Abstract

This article identifies four new realities shaping the ways in which Burkinabe radio journalists deal with the insecurity threat that emerged in 2015 and the rise of terrorism in the region, all of which are related to digital technologies. First, digital technologies may symbolically strengthen the collective radio journalist-listener link; second, digital technologies are also tools that help journalists and audiences face the challenges of the new security situation; and third, digital technologies can represent risks to journalists and listeners. But this research also highlights, fourthly, that digital technologies can be inappropriate, and that the security context is creating a new modernity for former—more traditional—uses of radio. These realities indicate that digital technologies are integral to the appropriating and modernising process affecting traditional modes of listening and reception. Drawing on 37 interviews and three focus groups with Burkinabe community radio journalists in 2022, the article discusses existing literature in the Global North that highlights the significant disruptive effect of digital technology on radio both as a device, and in terms of broadcasting and listening practices, with it being suggested that traditional FM radio's very survival is threatened. It finally shows that whilst digital technologies might sound a death knell for traditional broadcasting formats in the Global North, suggesting an 'either/or' situation, the situation differs in Burkina Faso, and therefore in other similarly affected conflict zones, where digital technologies reconceptualise the use of traditional radio without threatening it.

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Introduction

In contemporary conflict-ridden Burkina Faso, as in the past and as in many sub-Saharan African countries (Damome, 2006; Tudesq, 1998), radio is the most popular and widely-used medium. Being a word-of-mouth platform, radio is a source of information and a continuance of the time-honoured tradition of orality (Ceesay, 2000), strongly connected with the oral traditions which dominate 'par excellence' in Burkina Faso (Gunner, 2000: 1). Community radio is the main source of information for rural populations (Adjovi, 2007; Capitant, 2008; Zongo, 2021), acting as a tool for social communication and citizen participation in local development. Radio is also a privileged channel for citizen mobilisation and a tool of resilience (CTA, 2003). It is not only a principal source of information but is often the only one accessible due to poor connectivity, low literacy skills, and poverty.

But radio is not a fixed media and has adapted to the conflict situation that erupted in 2015. The roots of this situation are complex. On one hand, there is the terrorist threat: two main terrorist groups are active in the so-called "three borders" region joining Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso: the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wa Al-Muslimeen, JNIM). Both are umbrella organisations that claim to be jihadist, but as the label 'jihad', in its original religious context, is not specifically related to violence (Murawiec, 2008), this article chooses to use the term "terrorism". On the other hand, there is the social and extremely local dimension of the conflict, as well as the capacity of armed groups to exploit the cleavages that divide certain societies (ICG, 2017).

This article identifies four realities in which Burkinabe radio stations and their journalists deal with the new insecurity situation. Three are related to digital technologies. First, digital technologies may symbolically strengthen the collective radio journalist-listener link; second, digital technologies are also tools that help journalists and audiences face the challenges of the new security situation; and third, digital technologies can represent risks to journalists and listeners. But this research also highlights that digital technologies can be inappropriate, and that the security context is creating a new modernity for former uses of radio. Drawing on these findings and examining them from the perspective of the historical, socio-economic, cultural and political contexts underpinning radio's use in Burkina Faso, this article discusses and challenges assumptions from the Global North. Literature from the Global North tends to highlight the significant disruptive effect of digital technology on radio, not just as a device, but also in terms of both broadcasting and listening practices, with it being suggested that traditional FM radio has been subject to radical transformations, threatening its very survival. Whilst digital technologies might sound a death knell for traditional broadcasting formats in the Global North, suggesting an 'either/or' situation, we show that the use of traditional broadcasting formats prevails in contemporary Burkina Faso. Here, digital technologies do not directly

threaten traditional radio. However, in a context of permanent insecurity, new platforms enable 'new genres to emerge, or adaptations of old genres to continue' (Gunner, 2000: 13).

This perspective has a heuristic value. Indeed, studying the situation of radio in a country from the Global South is one way of reframing assumptions concerning the North. Conversely, basing our reflection on research anchored in other contexts—those of the North—allows this research to approach the African reality that we are used to studying differently. The article focuses on the differences that they highlight, without attempting to give an exhaustive account of the diversity of viewpoints in the literature in either the North or the South.

Burkina Faso is an appropriate counterpoint to challenge Global North-based research on radio and digital technologies as the conflict situation, ongoing since 2015, further distances us from contexts habitually discussed by literature focusing on the North and triggers a sudden adaptation of radio for Burkina. Whilst information is central in peacetime, it becomes vital during crises. Because the security and humanitarian crises in Burkina Faso are both unprecedented and relatively recent, the appropriation of digital technology seen elsewhere, particularly the internet and mobile phones, appears accelerated, making formulations and reformulations of radio more visible. Burkina Faso is a case study, but other 'counterpoints' would be just as heuristically rich, for other reasons.

Context

In Burkina Faso, radio is the most important medium with 185 radio stations (RSF, 2022). But these figures are approximate as the last census of radio stations conducted by the Burkina Faso Communication Council dates from 2015. It showed that besides public radio stations (30), most private radio stations are community radio stations (51). Commercial (40) and religious radio stations (40) were also numerous and there were only three international radio stations (CSC 2015). International media have almost disappeared from the Burkinabe media landscape since the military junta in power expelled the correspondents of two major French daily newspapers, Le Monde and Libération, in April 2023. This followed the suspension of the television channel France 24 5 days earlier and of Radio France Internationale (RFI) 4 months before that.

The population's adherence to—especially community—radio is attributed to the affordability of transistor radios (Capitant, 2008; INSD & FAPP, 2021) and its linguistic accessibility[1] (Bazongo and Beurel, 2020; Lamizana et al., 2018). Given the low adult literacy rate (29.7% in 2019 (INSD & FAPP, 2021)), radio is the channel of choice through which rural communities and low literacy populations inform, educate and train themselves. The advent of information and communication technologies marked by advances in mobile telephony has further increased radio's popularity.

The internet may be the dominant player as a convergence platform for radio (Mudhai, 2011: 263) but the mobile phone is the 'most pervasive manifestation of the new media in Africa' (Mabweazara, 2013: 235) forging new relationships between radio and its audience. Listeners can make themselves heard without moving nor speaking, by calling or

texting to interact. They can use new media to contact radio via messaging apps, email, or websites (Willems, 2013). Thus, mobile phones allow radio information to circulate without territorial or temporal limits (Kaufmann, 2019: 25) and challenge the orality both of Africa and of mobile phones as it allows for new forms of literacy, in other words, text messages (De Bruijn and Nyamnjoh, 2009). Comparing transistors and mobile phones in Africa, Kiyindou concludes that '[m]ore than radio, the telephone is present in every village, every home, every pocket' (2015: 11).

In Burkina Faso, internet access remains limited despite having 14 million subscribers theoretically connected to the internet in the first quarter of 2022 and a mobile phone penetration rate of 101.5% (ARCEP, 2022). This is largely due to insecurity, poverty and poor connectivity. Nonetheless, diversification of listening media exists and has led to upheavals in the production, broadcasting and consumption of radio information.

Before the instability started in 2015, journalists and listeners would share information, meet informally, and interactive programmes would discuss topical and local issues, making radio the tool for communities' social interactions (Damome, 2019). Therefore, radio, in Burkina Faso, as in other African countries, remained a communicative alternative to the elitist nature of urban media such as television and the printed and online press, and to widespread disinformation. Community radio dominates and 'constitutes a […] form of mediation in a hostile community, where the crisis is multiplied in a number of ways, where the social environment is gradually disintegrating and where the individual is increasingly self-centred' (Dieng, 2013). It also provides access to local information, which is vital given that the ongoing security situation differs significantly between locations and changes rapidly.

Since 2015, the security context and the media reality within Burkina Faso have changed notably. The country has become a breeding ground for terrorist violence, a broad term widely used to cover the multiple terrorist groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, to say nothing of intra-communal conflicts (Heywood and Yaméogo 2023).

In 2021, 216 terrorist-associated incidents resulting in 732 fatalities were recorded in Burkina Faso, against 191 in 2020, making Burkina Faso the second most affected country in Africa (IEP, 2022). The deteriorating security situation has led to massive displacement of people. In March 2022, there were nearly 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (CONASUR, 2022). 2.36 million were threatened by food insecurity, while 4,148 schools and 185 health facilities were closed, affecting 685,000 pupils and depriving 2.07 million people of health care (OCHA, 2022).

Examining the use of information and digital technology, at the heart of the media reality that emerged 8 years ago and now forming an integral part of Burkinabes' daily life, allows us to challenge some of the assumptions highlighted in literature concerning media in the Global North.

Literature Review

Orality has a long tradition in Africa and, as Gunner states (2000: 1), cannot be perceived as being simply an 'absence of literacy' highlighting how it is neither 'possible nor accurate to take one model that valorises the written word as the blueprint for how the

human race has developed'. She emphasises how the practice of oral mediation is dynamic depending on historical contexts. This also applies to the use of radio, which represents the modernisation of the oral tradition (Taureg and Wittmann, 2005: 16). It acts as a principal source of information and awareness-raising (Nyirenda et al., 2018) uniting communities and connecting rural and urban areas, literate and illiterate populations (Capitant, 2008).

Oral traditions have not disappeared and may, in fact, have protected radio, as the medium of the spoken word, from the threat of digital technologies (Ceesay, 2000; Mudhai, 2011). In Africa, radio dominates the mediasphere (afrobarometer 2018) and, according to Tudesq (2003: 73), is the only medium which has been truly 'Africanised'. It has also been described as Africa's 'most accessible source of public affairs information and news' (Kalyango, 2011: 119). Radio remains the most trusted source of information to populations in Burkina Faso particularly given increased levels of disinformation and mistrust in social media (Heywood and Yaméogo 2023). Nonetheless, digital technology advances have extended possibilities for radio listening and the associated increased dissemination of information at a time when radio stations are increasingly appropriating the internet and mobile phones as new broadcasting platforms (Mabweazara, 2013: 13). Listening associations or clubs, however, remain a characteristic of community radio and are defined as 'a small listening and discussion group that meets regularly to receive a special radio programme, which the members then discuss' (cited in Manyozo, 2012: 29). Factual or awareness-raising information in radio broadcasts can therefore be better accepted because it is shaped to the needs and values of the community. Mhagama (2015) noted that oral cultures enable individuals, radio listeners or not, to join the public spheres created through radio listening groups and associations, allowing them to express themselves and their needs through collective discussion and influence the information targeted at them.

In the Global North, because of the 'public neglect' of radio (Lewis, 2000) a gradual slide in perceptions has occurred whereby radio is now subsumed into 'the internet' and digital technologies, and the availability of digital access is barely questioned. Digital technologies provide listeners with opportunities to interact with programmes, presenters and other listeners through online chat rooms and messaging, a radical shift from traditional phone-ins (Drubber, 2013). Rather than being passive, listeners actively participate in shaping programmes and their production. Bonini suggests that 'while until recently the audience was invisible to radio and was confined to its private sphere...today listeners linked to the online profile of a radio programme are no longer invisible or private, and the same goes for the opinions and emotions' (2012: 18). Digital technology has triggered different listening experiences caused by new forms of radio interactivity and 'demassification' (Williams et al., 1988) with listeners able to listen on-demand, pause, skip content, and recreate their own schedule. In the Global North, it is said that the advance of technologies has 'radically redefined radio, turning it into an '"asocial" […] solo medium which is isolationist rather than communal' (Barnett and Morrison, 1989: 1). Listening therefore is more selective and deliberate, with Gazi and Bonini (2018: 109) further emphasising the North-South divide in digital access by discussing 'haptically mediated" radio listening in which radio content is no longer only aural but now involves

touch as the use of online radio apps becomes an integral part of listening. Media convergence, therefore, may 'alter the relationships between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences' (Jenkins, 2004: 334), but it must be accessible in the first place and not just assumed.

Radio in the Global North has not only reinvented itself through online and on demand radio but also through listener interactivity, personalisation and content modularisation (Sparks et al., 2016). Radio praxis has adapted to this new listening environment and to 'listen again' demands. Berry et al. (2014) is adamant that radio's future is not condemned to only being online, rather that practice adapts to the listener/broadcaster relationship. He argues that the internet will not replace traditional radio, but they must work together or converge. Yet there is little, if any, suggestion of what happens if the internet is not available in the first place. Berry et al. (2014) states that online radio should go further to ensure listener engagement by adding content, metadata, visuals and branded experiences, shifting the definition of oral radio and the understanding of radio space. This additional content emerges through the many online radio apps, reaching those who do not own or listen to conventional radio (Berry, 2019). Radio in the Global North therefore has become 'a screen medium: we access it through screens both mobile and static, using tactile visual and textual interfaces' (Hilmes, 2013: 44).

This radio world appears far removed from Burkina Faso's media environment and emphasises increasing divergences between digital technologies in the Global North and South. The assumption, both in the academic literature and in the praxis it discussed, is that the internet, and mobiles as tools to access it, are available. Moreover, much of this literature omits the potential risks of using digital technologies in security environments such as Burkina Faso. The need to generate information, so necessary against a backdrop of life-threatening conflicts, has also found no place within this radio/technology debate.

Virtual rather than national states, such as those run by terrorists, require virtual (digital or social) communication, which in turn can lead to personal (listener) and professional (journalist) WhatsApp or other social media groups being infiltrated. Thompson (2011) spoke of social media being an effective tool to recruit, radicalise members and infiltrate groups, and Seib (2011; 9) stated that extremism is inextricably linked to media technologies and networks with the latter being used for recruitment and fostering 'exponentially expanded information flows and pervasive interactive communication'. This use and misuse of information in conflict-affected environments must be considered. Information for audiences is vital and changing (Heywood and Yaméogo 2023) and is best provided by radio given its attributes in conflict contexts. Much has been written about the role of media and particularly radio in conflict and peacebuilding within Africa (Frère, 2011; Mbaine, 2006; Odine Kampala, 2013), on radio and mobile phones in conflict (for example, Chuma, 2013 in Zimbabwe) and on journalism and humanitarianism in the DRC (Fierens 2018). Radio has also been investigated alongside new media to promote democracy and development (Rønning, 1995; Nyamnjoh, 2005) and audience perceptions of radio stations and journalists (Frère, 2016; Heywood and Yaméogo, 2023). Research has recently been conducted into radio's role in Burkina Faso's conflict zones (see, for example, regarding IDPs (Heywood and Yaméogo 2023). We build on the above in adopting the specific perspective of technologies.

Traditional radio in Africa has not had to turn to digital technology for its 'survival' nor is digital technology triggering its demise, but technology is nonetheless influencing radio's reconceptualisation in Burkina Faso. This challenges Pluskota's statement that 'radio is a traditional, reliable technology, but its delivery format and lacking interactivity places the future of broadcast radio, as we know it, in jeopardy' (2015: 325).

The advent of information and communication technologies may be revolutionising radio, from the perspectives of media, usage and production-broadcasting and new media may be disrupting traditional practices, but neither are the same in the North and the South.

Method

This study[2] used a three-step innovative and inductive qualitative approach to investigate the media reality of radio in conflict-affected Burkina Faso, the aim being not to produce quantitative data, but to grasp, from the participants' discourse, the changes and continuities in the technology, production, broadcasting, and reception of radio information in this context.

In step one, journalists and radio presenters were selected from the 11 most popular community radio stations in terms of audience in the five regions most affected by terrorism (Est, Sahel, Nord, Centre-Nord and Boucle du Mouhoun) to understand their working conditions and how insecurity affects them socially and professionally. Community radio stations, rather than commercial or religious ones, were chosen because of their proximity to the population and because of their significance, both quantitatively and socio-culturally, within the Burkinabe media landscape and particularly in the chosen conflict intervention zones.

In step two, aided by radio managers, we identified 11 journalists in the five regions with whom we collectively designed an interview guide and who themselves interviewed colleagues working as journalists in the region, or "interviews by delegation". We called them "journalists-interviewers"'. We worked with journalists rather than with media organisations and their managers because, whilst both important, journalists are on the front line and provide the clearest picture of the intersections between radio, conflict and technology. By "doing interviews by delegation", we accessed a field that we otherwise could not have reached because of security reasons. Interviews were between peers, living in the same context, and not with researchers who did not share the interviewed journalists' daily realities. These "journalists-interviewers" conducted 33 interviews, from February to May 2022, either face-to-face or remotely by phone or WhatsApp.

In step three, the researchers and the journalists-interviewers met for 2 days just outside the capital and exchanged views on the data collected in step two through personal interviews with the researchers, three focus groups, and plenary sessions. Following the workshop, recordings and transcripts of both the 33 interviews made by the journalists-interviewers and the four interviews and focus groups conducted by the research team were uploaded to a central database. The data was triangulated and analysed thematically through a technology lens (this research is part of a larger project), and integrated into existing literature on the Global North, radio and Burkina Faso.

Whilst the results touch on reception, this study focuses on the perspectives of journalists adapting to both the change in reporting environment (insecurity situation since 2015) and the emergence of technologies which might help or hinder their task.

Results

The study highlights the centrality of digital technologies within Burkinabe radio on one hand and journalists' adaptation strategies to the conflict situation on the other. Four results emerged. First, digital technologies allow fragmented and physically isolated communities to continue to dialogue virtually, share information, thus remaining socially connected. Second, digital technologies modernise the symbolic unifying role of radio by making it very real. Radio now becomes a means to save lives in real terms. Third, digital technologies represent a double-edged sword; having images or recordings on their phone puts journalists' lives at risk if discovered by terrorists when mobiles are seized or if WhatsApp groups are infiltrated. And finally, digital technologies can also be inappropriate, and the security context is creating a new modernity for former uses of radio.

Individualisation or communities

In contemporary Burkina Faso, communities are increasingly fragmented and physically isolated and IDPs are constantly being displaced as terrorists advance. Roads are dangerous due to IEDs, and attacks result in populations no longer being able to visit or be visited. Curfews reinforce their isolation and communities turn to radio for vital information. Journalists are aware of this:

> We get feedback from communities who say they rely on radio to keep them informed. They can't just leave their villages and go to another one; when the telephone is cut off, they can't contact their relatives, there's only radio to keep them company. So, when they get the opportunity to talk to you, they tell you in no uncertain terms that you [radio journalists] are now the only ones they can count on because when a radio closes down, as some would say, it's like a star that goes out in the galaxy. (J1, Boucle du Mouhoun).[3]

Listeners and journalists need links with the 'outside world' and with the villages they have left. Digital communities can provide these links, illustrating that the 'collective' and its associated social cohesion, is not undermined by new technologies. Symbolic links are thus created.[4]

While listeners and journalists used to meet informally during their daily activities, online conversations have replaced offline exchanges. Digital tools allow audiences and journalists to continue to dialogue virtually, especially through WhatsApp groups. Other digital communication platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram serve as sources to disseminate radio news, thereby broadening consumer audiences and ensuring that listeners are included in this new online community. They provide opportunities for

both journalists and listeners to interact with radio just as they had before the conflict. They are thus tools which serve to rebuild the journalist-listener community, which existed previously but which had been weakened by the security context.

WhatsApp is also used as a tool to strengthen the community of journalists, whose members face increased vulnerability as terrorist targets. Radio journalists still need to work in collectives, challenging ideas of individualisation and isolated working associated with digital technology, to pool knowledge and to gain solidarity in times of crisis. News conferences, now held virtually, are essential, and become more than professional meetings, instead forming a means to maintain links within the journalist community. The online editorial conference constitutes a moment of sharing and solidarity highly appreciated by the staff who can no longer physically meet.

However, technologies have their limits. According to some journalists, it is the journalists' vocation to go and find news, be amongst the people, and no social network is able to replace that.

> If this is taken away from you, it affects you mentally. Because we need human contact, we need to go to the villages, see how the community lives, what the customs are, what makes them different from others. (J1, Boucle de Mouhoun)

As one radio journalist remarked,

> There are areas that are practically inaccessible today, areas where we used to go frequently. But now, it's almost impossible, unless you're escorted by the armed forces. It's clear that even when you're escorted, you're afraid. So, there you have it. There have been changes in that respect, even though there are areas where even if you can't get to them, you can still use the phone to call. But there are areas where you can't call anymore. There is no mobile network anymore, so it's complicated. (J1, Boucle du Mouhoun)

WhatsApp, via mobile phones, has thus partly brought about a 'deterritorialisation' of radio, no longer restricted by geographical boundaries, and it communicates information through voice messages and by relaying broadcasts. It extends the oral dimension of radio and symbolically brings together fragmented communities. Listeners and journalists can be alone whilst acting as part of an imagined online group via messaging, streaming and accessing recorded shows. New digital technologies (WhatsApp and mobiles here) are the—imperfect—tools that unite these imagined radio communities and render physical links between radio and listeners no longer essential; 'oral deterritorialisation' circumvents physical restrictions imposed on traditional radio and by the conflict.

Through digital orality, journalists create a bond with a newly expanded online community and create a distant intimacy, reminiscent of traditional radio with remote or excluded audiences which, during conflict, would not be possible with a traditional transistor radio. Radio, in its reconceptualised form, contributes to social cohesion in conflict-affected areas where inter-community tensions are extensive.

Praxis: the symbolic becomes concrete

The symbolic unifying role of radio in its newly updated concrete configuration is supported by praxis. By December 2021, high-insecurity regions were witnessing community radio stations having to stop broadcasting because of the terrorist threat (Yaméogo 2022). Facilities and equipment had been destroyed, and journalists had been forced to resign, move or retrain (Yaméogo 2018). Whilst those working in radio may opt to use online tools out of convenience as it stops them having to travel, it saves time, and information can be easily recorded, they are now obliged to conduct 'isolated' reporting because of the conflict, threats or the inaccessibility of villages.

Radio's migration to new technologies is now being used to avoid physically interviewing people and journalists are adapting by using WhatsApp and phone calls to interact with sources. One journalist from western Burkina Faso described how they would gather information for broadcasts from networks of local correspondents but now they use recording equipment through mobile phones and digital technology, which are at the core of their professional practices.

> We mostly work using our mobiles, even the editorial staff, and WhatsApp. So we don't have to be together. For instance, two journalists or two presenters can't meet at the radio. That's what we used to do. Now, you've an hour to record a programme, an hour to record the news. You come, you do it and you leave, for security reasons. Since 2017, there's been no such thing as a live broadcast. It's all pre-recorded. (J2, Sahel)

The radio/listener interaction, which goes beyond radio programming, is vital in this conflict zone as audiences, protecting their need for information and their allegiance to radio, warn journalists about dangerous situations on the ground and in villages. One local reporter stated that they were aware that they were in a two-way relationship with communities; populations relied on them to provide information but that they needed populations as sources, particularly in seriously affected areas such as Djibo, where they had set up WhatsApp groups with listeners. The reporter said that the population of Djibo's nine sectors was now concentrated into four with the others being held by terrorists. When terrorists come into the four populated sectors, listeners would message the journalists to warn them against reporting and contacting sources. The information circulating between radio journalists and listeners is transmitted in multiple formats for different purposes. It could be one-to-one messaging, or radio broadcasts sent to isolated listeners as digital links, simple messages between journalists themselves, and between stations and online listening groups. Listeners also receive radio information through pre-recorded programmes. These are extensive with many journalists opting for recorded broadcasts than live ones because of safety but also as it gave them time for detailed editing needed to protect identities:

> We don't go beyond the city now. We try to deal with small issues. Once it's further away, we try to get contacts to help us. When we need to broadcast voices and we know that it's a sensitive subject that can identify the information source, we try to scramble the voice with

software. We have a trained technician doing this. We don't rush with sensitive subjects. After editing, we send it to the editor-in-chief, or the director. We take the time not to expose ourselves. In some cases, for the news, we prefer to record in advance so that we don't do the live feed to avoid the curfew. (J6, Est)

Because of terrorism threats, journalists pre-record nightly broadcasts during the day and broadcast them at the scheduled times with no staff present. This is because government-imposed curfews start at 6p.m. so presenters would have to be home before the news starts and also because of terrorist threats when travelling to and from work in the dark. Nonetheless, radio's feature of liveness, directness and associated trust is ensured (Crisell, 1994).

We record certain programmes that should be live. For example, for some time now, our news programme has been recorded. We record and broadcast in the news slot at 7.45 p.m. So when you listen, you get the impression that it's live because that's the time of the news. But it was done at four or five o'clock and scheduled. From 8 p.m. or 7 p.m., we are on computer backup until midnight. We've got equipment which puts the radio on automatic start-up and automatic cut-off. (FG1)

Previously obliged to travel to isolated areas at great personal risk or abandon communities leaving them in a situation whereby news cannot enter or leave, correspondents in these zones transmit their news remotely building solidarity amongst local, national and international communities and reinforcing a pre-existing but now threatened collective. 'There are people who used to come by bike or motorbike to give us information about their village, of interest to the population of these villages. Today, with the insecurity, it's difficult. We've been given quality equipment to record our interviewees by telephone' (J1, Boucle de Mouhoun). They suggested that they must adapt to WhatsApp, or other remote platforms, or abandon their listeners who would become even more isolated. Radio journalists define their role as crucial for populations. Whatever the case, interaction remains central at each stage of this communicative process; journalists contact listeners, who reply via their phones to the presenter. After the broadcast, the communication continues digitally through the transference of information from the broadcast circulated via WhatsApp, and traditionally via *grins* or informal tea groups (Bondez, 2013), interpersonal, and community interactions.

Digital technology as a source of danger

Whilst digital technologies have many advantages, in the current context of Burkina Faso, they are also a source of danger. Journalists are aware of the risks and that digital technologies and particularly mobile phones must be treated with caution as the terrorists themselves are amongst their listeners and can hold information broadcast over radio against them.

> We have to remind ourselves that they're listening to us. Once, during a broadcast, someone called up and introduced himself as a jihadist. He said he was calling from Titao and that he listened to our programme. I was terrified. I prayed that the presenter wouldn't screw up. But our colleague managed to get away with it without fouling up the show. (J3, Nord)

By simply having images or recordings on their phone, journalists' lives can be threatened. Similarly, a WhatsApp group infiltrated by terrorists can put all its participants at risk. The freedom to join WhatsApp (and other) groups has the downside of allowing 'terrorists' to infiltrate these groups or create them for use as recruitment bases for their ideologies (Yaméogo 2018). Therefore, 'technology' represents a threat to radio practice and, rather than the internet acting as a solution to our distributive needs, it acts as a hindrance and requires controlling. Journalists recounted their need to monitor WhatsApp group membership. They said that chief editors were the sole group administrators with rights to accept someone into the group, and that once a colleague left the radio they were removed instantly from the group.

> He's no longer under our influence, he's changed families. We're not against him, we have his number, we chat, we call each other, but in the WhatsApp group, we prefer to remove him because he can report things exchanged in this group to another environment that we don't control. (FG1)

But the threats go further and target individuals and radios resulting in widespread self-censorship amongst presenters. Women presenters in particular are subject to psychological intimidation and threats as the terrorists say that women should no longer work at the radio.

> We practise self-censorship at the radio given the security situation because there have been threats. With the terrorists we've had calls during interactive programmes, […] we do everything possible to avoid broadcasting certain programmes that the terrorists don't like. (FG1)

Self-censorship extends to listeners who refuse to speak on air. Reporters said that 'as soon as they know it's radio nobody wants to speak, whatever the subject, many refuse to speak to the microphone, simply because everyone feels threatened.' (J1, Boucle de Mouhoun).

Merely being in possession of a mobile phone can result in journalists being threatened. If captured by terrorists, their phones are immediately seized as they may contain incriminating, or even useful, information. Radio journalists have to take all precautions to ensure they are not identified as journalists or have any content that could feed the terrorists' suspicions. Furthermore, journalists are often threatened through anonymous phone calls. Rather than being a communicative tool, mobile phones and the information they contain become a tool of transactional relationships which obliges journalists (and also listeners) to exercise great caution over their phone's content so as not

to offend their interrogators, who are aware of the communicative capacity of these phones, and to protect their lives.

Beyond technologies

Digital technologies can also be inappropriate or even irrelevant. Nonetheless, accessing the internet remains an impossibility for many even if they have a phone as they do not have the means to pay for it, or connectivity in their host regions. Furthermore, basic radio sets become essential again as mobile connection towers are targeted by the terrorists and are being destroyed, cutting off villages and isolating them (Lamarche and Bentley, 2022).

Advances and convergences between old and new media have therefore resulted in the modernisation of traditional modes of listening and are vital in ensuring information reaches isolated or displaced communities without internet connection, FM reach, or who are without a transistor radio or mobile phone. It is here that we note non-internet-based advances to radio in the Burkinabe context. These advances are embodied in solar-powered or wind-up radio and loudspeakers, used in remote communities to relay factual and awareness-raising information (Reliefweb, 2020). Provided mainly by NGOs or similar agencies, radio evolves with the past, maintaining its direct oral form, using old ideas but renovated with digital technology for contemporary use. This reconceptualised transistor radio reinforces the advantages of traditional in-person listening collectives, rather than imaginary ones, as individuals join together around solar radios or loud-speakers to receive and discuss information, highlighting radio's sociability and its role to communicate information. Solar radio and loudspeakers replicate oral traditions of lis-tening collectives when communities would gather to receive information from *griots,* or verbal wordsmiths, or praise singers (Gunner, 2000). Now, villages gather informally around adapted loudspeakers to receive information, discuss it, and pass it on to their communities.

The terrorist threat is shaping a new context and creating a new modernity for former uses of radio. Sound systems and solar-power radio overcoming geographical and technological isolation, particularly amongst IDPs and host communities in the northern region of the country. Broadcasts are played to listener collectives, reinforcing 'enduring intersections between radio as the medium of the voice and the oral traditions of local culture' (Mabweazara, 2013: 240). The distribution of solar-powered radios, for example, as reconceptualised transistor radio sets is allowing access to information particularly amongst rural, isolated communities underpinning radio's traditional materiality. Thus, a process of 'reterritorialising' regions under threat occurs whereby traditional radio can always be relied upon whereas internet-based radio, by its very nature, is not 'inde-pendent' meaning that if one variable fails, the information flow fails.

Conclusion

Radio in conflict-affected Burkina Faso defines its own modernities whilst remaining a traditional vehicle for communication. It redefines its own heritage and, resembling (Vail and White, 1991) observation regarding orality, it does so by absorbing and reflecting

changes within the society it articulates, and provides a sense of the past in the present (Barber, 1989).

Using the specific case of community radio journalists in conflict-ridden Burkina Faso, the article explored how digital technologies 'deterritorialise' radio broadcasting and listening, both symbolically and in practice, circumventing physical restrictions imposed on traditional radio and by the conflict, but also constitute a source of danger. Challenging criticisms in literature in the Global North that the internet increases individualised listening (Barnett and Morrison, 1989) and further isolates remote individuals and communities in times of conflict, listening to radio in this way (on the internet) in fact reconfigures interaction with the listener. Rather than radio being a one-way flow of information, listeners can communicate with those in the studio and beyond, via mobiles, and via online messaging platforms such as WhatsApp.

In a context of extreme insecurity and isolation, digital technology does not threaten traditional radio as it cannot function in these circumstances. The Global North is definitively different from the South, just as Francophone Africa is different from Anglophone Africa (Capitant and Frère, 2012) and this article has highlighted the need to contextualise and nuance investigations. Access to the internet and digital technologies cannot be assumed and the conflict and the oral tradition in Burkina Faso has highlighted how assumptions about the demise of radio are far from a reality. This context has in fact resulted in a 'reterritorialisation' of radio in regions under threat. Here, traditional radio, in modernised forms using solar radio or loudspeakers, is relied upon to ensure the information flow.

Therefore, whilst recognising that radio may be shifting towards a new radio paradigm, proclaiming the internet and online listening to be the new future must be contextualised. When investigating radio and radio news in Burkina Faso in times of conflict, essentialist FM versus internet binaries must be avoided. Convergence is the new future with the listener/journalist not selecting one or the other at whim but rather subject to the vagaries and inconsistencies of a conflict environment.

This article is therefore an attempt to compare and contrast perspectives on journalism from the 'South' and the 'North'. The points of view presented here were selected for their heuristic value and have focused on the differences that they bring to light, without attempting to give an exhaustive account of the diversity of viewpoints that prevail in the literature on the North on the one hand and the South on the other. Further research on the multitude of common features that the media landscapes of the North and the South share, and that this same literature helps to illustrate, would also be useful. The article has highlighted the fact that radio, like the society in which it evolves, is the product of an ever-changing historical, cultural, political, and socio-economic process. Contemporary media realities are therefore inevitably different, as their evolution has taken place in different contexts and temporalities. The article argues, however, that these dissimilarities deserve to be explored alongside one another. If research from the North has allowed us to interrogate the reality of Burkina Faso in this article, it is also the case that the few results presented here can be used to reinterrogate the realities of the North.

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Notes

1. Burkina Faso has 59 national languages including French, but the latter is spoken by only a minority of Burkinabes.
2. The data was collected in the context of Burkina Faso's security crisis and funded by the Belgian Academy for Research and Higher Education (ARES).
3. Interviewees have been anonymised. Journalists are coded by 'J' plus a number and the region they come from (e.g. J7, Nord), and focus groups are coded FG plus a number (e.g. FG3).
4. Translation into English is by the research team.

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